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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: "EVERYONE IS A WINNER" IN EP ELECTION

REF: LJUBLJANA 157

¶1. (U) Slovenia's June 7 elections for seven seats in the European Parliament (EP) provided no surprises, as the unofficial results on June 8 mirrored the final pre-election polling numbers. The Slovene Democratic Party (SDS), the main opposition party, and Prime Minister Pahor's Social Democrats (SD) both won two seats, with Lozje Peterle of Nova Slovenija (NSi), Jelko Kacin of Liberal Democrats of Slovenia (LDS), and Ivo Vajgl of Zares each getting a seat. The two opposition parties, SDS and NSi, took 43.2 percent of the votes (SDS at 26.9 and NSi at 16.3 percent), with coalition parties SD, LDS, and Zares combining for 39.8 of the vote (SD at 18.5 percent, LDS at 11.5, and Zares at 9.8 percent). Turnout, 28.25 percent, was almost identical to the 2004 EP elections (28.35 percent), and well below the EU average.

¶2. (SBU) Each party claimed victory on its own terms. According to Janez Jansa and SDS, the election results vindicated their criticism of the government's handling of the economic crisis (reftel), even as the coalition parties touted their 4-3 majority in Slovenia's EP contingent as validation of their governance. Both Jansa and PM Pahor told the press that these results "were expected" and there were no surprises. Pahor noted that SD had improved from fourth to second place compared to the 2004 EP results. NSi, LDS, and Zares all polled better in percentage terms in the EP elections than in Slovenia's September 2008 parliamentary elections, which some commentators attributed to the personal popularity of Peterle, Kacin (both of whom had name recognition from their current service as MEPs), and Vajgl, respectively, rather than the standing of their parties.

¶3. (U) Peterle, Kacin, and Romana Jordan Cizelj (SDS) will retain their current EP seats, while Zoran Thaler and Tanja Fajon (SD), Milan Zver (SDS), and Vajgl are EP newcomers. Thaler, a former foreign minister, Vajgl, current head of the parliamentary foreign affairs committee, and Zver, a former minister of higher education, are long-time players on the Slovenian political scene. Fajon, by contrast, is a broadcast journalist and has spent most of the past decade outside of Slovenia as the RTV Slovenija correspondent in Brussels.

¶4. (C) Comment: Slovenia's election campaign remained focused on domestic issues all the way to election day, and the balanced outcome means that no party gained a significant domestic advantage that would shake up the status quo. We do not see the low turnout as a reflection of any widespread disillusionment with the EU, as Slovenians usually poll well above average in positive feelings toward the EU. Instead, the turnout likely hinges on whether voters have a strong personal affinity for any of the candidates. In the EP elections, there is no systemic incentive to vote "against" a specific candidate or party, as there is in Slovenia's proportional parliamentary election system; this systemic difference can be seen in the disproportionate success of NSi, LDS, and Zares in the EP compared to domestic elections.
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